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## Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre: Internship Report

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Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre: Internship Report

An Internship Report

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

University of New Orleans

In partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Arts Administration

By

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B.F.A. University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2004

November 2012

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## **Abstract**

The following report documents my internship with Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre (SLT) during the summer of 2012. Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre was established in 1968. It is beloved by many faithful patrons in the New Orleans community. During my internship, I worked with the administrative staff and box office manager to focus on box office operations and volunteer coordination.

My primary goals were to sell tickets for the upcoming season and to obtain volunteers for purposes of ushering the shows, and keeping patrons happy. This internship report provides an overview of Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre based on observational research and thorough analysis. The report examines organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, internal/external issues, and provides best practices of a similar organization and recommendations for organizational improvement.

## Chapter 1- Introduction

During the 2012 summer months, I served as an intern at Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre (SLT). My main focus was box office operations, and I also served as the season's volunteer coordinator. As a graduate student in Arts Administration, working at Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre served me well. I had a fresh perspective on show business due to the classes I took at University of New Orleans including Arts Development, Arts Law, Arts Marketing, and most importantly for this particular internship, Theatre Overview. I frequently tapped into my arts administration knowledge to compare operations of Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre to what I recently learned during my graduate studies.

In order to fully understand SLT, it is important to know its history, mission, and organizational practices. Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre made its debut in the summer of 1968 with *Annie Get Your Gun*, *The Student Prince*, and *Carousel* to combine the talents of students, professionals and members of the community to produce the highest caliber of local theatre possible. Each summer season following 1968, Summer Lyric has brought musical theatre to the City of New Orleans (See Appendix A).

Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre has had only one significant leadership change in its 44 years of existence. The founder of Summer Lyric Theatre, Mr. Monachino, passed away unexpectedly in 2003. B. Michael Howard had been a performer in every Summer Lyric show while serving as a vocal instructor and music professor at Tulane University. He was the clear replacement for Frank Monachino (Barbara Workman). Mr. Howard has dedicated many years to the success of the organization. He has seen SLT through various adversities, all the while maintaining its core mission.

The mission of Summer Lyric Theatre, is to be “a musical theatre performing organization based on the campus of Tulane University. Summer Lyric aims to preserve one of America's greatest art forms by producing the highest quality musical theatre. Our theatre exists to support and expand musicians, actors, singers, dancers, technical artists and most important, students of promise, as well as those who are already established by bringing together both the university's resources and the community.”

In addition to the mission statement, SLT's website (2012) explains its establishment as follows: “each season Summer Lyric Theatre employs the talents of over 200 paid and volunteer actors, singers, dancers, musicians, directors, choreographers, designers and technical artists. Hundreds of individuals audition each year to be a part of the Summer Lyric experience, an experience many characterize as among the best and most professional theatrical opportunities in the Gulf South region. This standard of artistic excellence, for which Summer Lyric is known, has become a hallmark and gives young emerging talent the opportunity to work alongside professionals in a truly collaborative atmosphere.”

Summer Lyric is a unique establishment in that it operates under the umbrella of Tulane University. Most theatrical organizations operate either as 501(c)(3) non-profit entities, or as for-profit entities. Tulane University is itself a non-profit organization. Summer Lyric Theatre is a distinct program within the University, which provides a maintenance staff, electricity, rent, and covers other expenses at no cost to Summer Lyric.

## **Chapter 2-Internship Description**

During my time at Summer Lyric Theatre, I was an intern with two titles: Box Office Assistant and Volunteer Coordinator.

My specific daily duties in the box office included:

- Answering phones
- Returning messages
- Assigning seats
- Helping patrons purchase tickets over the phone using Astor Street (ticketing software)
- Exchanging tickets for season subscribers
- Calming irate customers
- Mailing tickets
- Filing

My duties as volunteer coordinator included:

- Emailing/calling volunteers
- Sending reminders to volunteers as to when they were expected to show up at the theatre
- Assigning responsibilities to the volunteers
- Creating/maintaining spreadsheets that tracked volunteers and their assignments

There were two main spreadsheets that had to be updated and cross referenced for each volunteer and his/her respective duties (Appendix D).

Another job I was asked to do was set up and co-host the nightly performance patron parties. Each night that a performance was held at the theatre donors were invited to the Music Chair's office to enjoy complimentary refreshments. I helped Charlie set up the party and hosted it with him each night.

Other various tasks during my internship involved preparing bulk season ticket mailers, filing, organizing, and improving the Summer Lyric Facebook page. I made myself available to assist Charlie and James.



## Chapter 3- Revenue

Tulane Summer Lyric heavily relies on ticket sales to fund its productions. Charlie F. Hayes (Operations Manager) and Barbara Workman (Chair of the Steering Committee) both stand firmly behind this fact. SLT's budgets range from season to season but tend to be in the ballpark of \$350,000. Actual budget breakdowns were not available. In the summer of 2012, \$72,875 was raised from patron donations, and the rest of the budget (approximately 80%) was covered by ticket sales. The theatre holds 970 seats, so the potential revenue from selling season tickets is almost \$400,000. Summer Lyric does not have many of the overhead expenses other theatres face, so it is at an advantage. It is feasible for them to rely greatly on ticket sales.

In addition to ticket sales, Tulane accepts donations from prominent members of the New Orleans community. There are five donor levels:

- Archangel
  - Gives \$5,000 and receives the following in exchange:
    - 4 Season Tickets
    - 10 Tickets to Wednesday Preview Nights
    - Private Reception at Intermission
    - Reserved Parking at Dixon Hall
    - Acknowledgement in Programs
- Angel
  - Gives \$800 and receives the following in exchange:
    - 4 Season Tickets
    - 4 Tickets to Wednesday Preview Nights

- Private Reception at Intermission
  - Reserved Parking at Dixon Hall
  - Program Listing
- Patron
  - Gives \$525 and receives the following in exchange:
    - 2 Season Tickets
    - 2 Tickets to Wednesday Preview Nights
    - Private Reception at Intermission
    - Program Listing
- Donor
  - Gives \$275 and receives the following in exchange:
    - 2 Season Tickets
    - Program Listing
- Sponsor
  - Gives \$160 and receives the following in exchange:
    - 1 Season Ticket
    - Program Listing

For the 2012 SLT season, there was one Archangel, 44 Angels, 19 Patrons, 68 Donors, and 25 Sponsors. Supporters receive the perks for their category with little or no hard cost to Summer Lyric. A great benefit for donors is that they may write off the tax-deductible portion of their donations (i.e. the portion of their gifts over and above the value of items received).

As mentioned in the introduction, Tulane SLT does not have to pay for its building, electricity, running water, or most maintenance services. This serves as a great benefit to the organization allowing it use money obtained from donations and ticket sales to focus on paying professional talent such as: actors, directors, choreographers, designers, and production personnel.

## Chapter 4- Outreach & Education

There are few outreach programs in place at Summer Lyric. It is rare for SLT to apply for or receive grant money. When speaking with Charlie F. Hayes, he was able to provide one example of community outreach from the 2009 season. In that season, the New Orleans City Council and Harrah's Casino offered a grant of \$10,000 to Summer Lyric Theatre. A requirement of the grant was for SLT to allow any Orleans Parish public school student (high school age or below) to attend one performance free of charge. The season that summer entailed *Oliver!*, *Company*, and *South Pacific*. The grant subsidized the tickets for the students. Charlie thought *Company* too mature for a younger audience. He allowed 9<sup>th</sup> grade and above to view that show. 8<sup>th</sup> graders and under were only allowed to view *Oliver!* or *South Pacific* (Hayes). No grant or outreach programs have been organized since the 2009 summer season.

## **Chapter 5- Goals for the Future of SLT**

When Charlie F. Hayes was asked about goals for the future of SLT he simply replied that the organization has been running smoothly for 44 years. He said at this time there are no goals set for the future. There is no thought about what will happen to Tulane Summer Lyric when B. Michael Howard decides to retire, or step down from his reign as Artistic Director (Hayes).

Ms. Workman says that she knows of no one willing to take on the responsibility or work load that Mr. Howard has so diligently conducted for the past 15 years. There is not an obvious current successor to Mr. Howard. Perhaps when the University decides to bring someone else on to the music staff as a professor it will incorporate the responsibility of running Summer Lyric Theatre as part of the job description (Workman).

## **Chapter 6- S.W.O.T Analysis**

### **ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTHS**

As a well-known theatre establishment, Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre has several strengths that have allowed it to be successful for 44 years. These strengths include the following:

- A consistent group of annual donors
- A subscriber base that renew season tickets every year
- A large group of volunteers
- Great press reviews for most productions
- A beautiful facility
- An outstanding creative team that provides
  - Costumes
  - Musical direction
  - Theatrical direction
  - Sets
  - Experienced company managers

### **ANNUAL DONORS**

Many of Tulane Summer Lyric donors give to the organization every year. Donors are allowed to choose their seats before anyone else and depending on the amount of their donations may receive premium parking privileges and invitations to the intermission patron parties. Many of these people come to SLT to enjoy the productions as well as to socialize with fellow donors.

## **SUBSCRIBERS**

Once a season subscriber selects his/her seat he/she is allowed to keep that seat every year until a better seat becomes available. The longer a person remains a subscriber, the better chance he/she has to obtain preferential seating. Single ticket buyers are allowed to select their seats only after the subscribers have claimed their spots.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

The incentive to volunteer at Tulane SLT is to see productions for free. Rather than buying tickets to performances, volunteers can trade their services for a free seat.

## **PRESS REVIEWS**

Elizabeth Argus has become a local celebrity over her years of performing a leading role in at least one, often two Summer Lyric productions each season. She has a strong following and is adored by many theatre enthusiasts in the New Orleans community. The press dotes on Liz Argus by writing glowing reviews of her, along with other productions put on by the organization.

## **FACILITY**

Tulane Summer Lyric's performances are held on the Uptown Tulane University campus in Dixon Hall. This building is home to offices and classrooms for Tulane music students, music faculty, and Summer Lyric Theatre. It also houses a gorgeous theatre space that hosts SLT productions every summer. According to [www.tulane.edu](http://www.tulane.edu), this hall was built in 1929. The lobby boasts dark wooden panels, regal chandeliers, and large inviting doors that lead into the theatre. The space is ornate and detailed. The proscenium-arch beautifully frames the stage

action. The red seats are timeless. The theatre as a whole has a well-maintained historical presence.

### **CREATIVE TEAM- COSTUMES**

SLT orders a majority of its costumes from a Broadway costume rental company. Its experienced costume staff returns year after year to embellish and adjust these costumes to fit the needs of each particular show. The costumes that cannot be ordered are created with leadership of Charlotte Lang and Linda Fried. These two women have worked as costumers in the New Orleans community for many years and always stand by their work even through the run of each show they wardrobe. They are backstage ready to repair any rips or handle any mishaps that may happen during a production. Tulane could not ask for more dedication to costuming its productions.

### **CREATIVE TEAM- MUSICAL DIRECTION**

Leonard Raybon usually serves as the musical director for SLT shows. He coaches the actors through the rehearsal process and also conducts the orchestra. He has been actively involved in Summer Lyric productions for many years. When he is not a musical director for a production it is because he is on stage as part of the cast. He has played Lil' Abner in *Lil' Abner* and Prince/Wolf in *Into the Woods* in recent years (2008 and 2011).

### **CREATIVE TEAM- THEATRICAL DIRECTION**

Diane Lala, B. Michael Howard, and the occasional talented guest handle all theatrical direction of Tulane Summer Lyric productions. Diane Lala is a musical theatre instructor at Cincinatti Conservatory of Music during the school year. She spends her summers with SLT in her home city, New Orleans. B. Michael Howard is, as mentioned in the introduction, the



Artistic Director of SLT. He usually directs one show per season in addition to overseeing all operations.

#### **CREATIVE TEAM- SETS**

Rick Paul has designed sets for SLT since 1979. He executes his artistry through designing innovative, colorful, and functional sets for each Summer Lyric show.

#### **CREATIVE TEAM- COMPANY MANAGEMENT**

Charlie F. Hayes leads operations of volunteers, payroll, box office, donors, and front of house leadership. He is very reliable, friendly, and intelligent. He has dedicated his time and energy to Tulane SLT's success for more than a decade.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL WEAKNESSES**

Weaknesses accompany the strengths at Summer Lyric Theatre. The following are some examples of organizational weaknesses:

- Antiquated box office software
- Out-dated ticketing system resulting in a long ticket purchase process
- A cluttered box office
- A faulty filing system
- A lack of presence in social media outlets (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and FourSquare)
- A lack of exciting incentives to become or remain patrons or donors
- Facility-related issues that need to be addressed with the University
  - Bathroom signage
  - Unsafe balcony
  - Inconvenient parking options
- Aging audiences
- Late arrival of promotion through the press
- Management complacency regarding customer service and systems modernization

## **ANTIQUATED TICKETING SOFTWARE**

An entrenched management habit at SLT is accepting current box office operations as consistent and effective. There is no hurry to update. SLT has antiquated ticketing software. The brand name of the software is Astor Street. I believe it to be out of date because searching for a

patron within the software is too time consuming. It is quirky and must be dealt with accordingly. The operations may not be updated until a machine breaks or the software completely fails. My fear is this will happen in the middle of a busy hour and create a chaotic situation for all involved. This is unhealthy for the organization.

### **RECORDING TICKET SALES (SYSTEM AND PROCESS)**

Not only is the software out of date, but for each seat assigned a seating chart made of foam board must be marked in pencil with the first letter of the show for which the person on the phone just purchased a ticket (see Appendix C). This may sound complicated because it is. There are several tiny boxes with capital letters penciled in them. If someone moves seats, it is hard to track on these boards because the employees forget to erase the letter in the box representing the seat the patron vacated. I witnessed seats going unused or double booked as a result of this. This can become frustrating for both the patrons and the employees.

Summer Lyric Theatre runs each of its shows for one weekend only. By the time the last minute ticket buyers realize they want to attend the performances, it is a little too late. He/she must come to the box office in person or call over the phone. Most people do not have time to fuss with SLT's system of answering the phone and returning calls. Most calls are not returned the same day in which they are received, due to such a high call volume. It is very hectic in the box office during the weeks of shows.

### **BOX OFFICE ENVIRONMENT**

An internal weakness that met my eye upon entering the work space was how unorganized and messy the box office was. Clutter was on every surface, some of which didn't

have to do with box office information. Order forms were often buried under other paperwork and were unable to be found when needed.

## **FILING**

An abundance of tickets purchased over the phone calls for a lot of paperwork. For each ticket order taken (over the phone or in person) an 8 ½ x 11 piece of paper is filled out with the purchaser's name, address, phone number, email, performance night, number of tickets, credit card information, and seat assignment. Those papers are then "filed" by the patron's last name. The problem with this is that they are not alphabetized within their respective folders. So each time a paper needs to be tracked (which occurs 5-10 times per day), the entire stack within the folder must be sifted through. Papers are often overlooked due to this task. This is a time wasting activity.

## **CUSTOMER RELATIONS - SOCIAL MEDIA**

There is a lack of social media presence for Summer Lyric Theatre. A Facebook page exists, but it is not well kept. There is not a Twitter or a Foursquare account for SLT. The importance of these tools is overlooked by the staff. Improving presence in the area of social media is an opportunity for SLT to reach more potential customers.

## **CUSTOMER RELATIONS - FUNDRAISING**

Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre is located in the heart of Uptown New Orleans. This area of the city is home to many wealthy, culturally minded citizens. SLT has not yet capitalized on potential patrons –especially a younger generation than presently attends SLT productions- that may live near its theatre, by way of throwing an annual party/fundraiser. It is my

observation that the majority of Summer Lyric's current patron base will not be around in 10-15 years.

#### **UNIVERSITY ISSUES THAT EFFECT SLT- BATHROOM SIGNAGE**

There is only one women's bathroom stall and two men's stalls in the lobby to accommodate the 970-seat theatre. Other restroom stalls are available in an annex building, but are difficult for someone to find if he/she is not familiar with the space. There isn't any signage to point a patron in the right direction from the lobby, either. With only fifteen minutes for intermission it is difficult for elderly patrons and those with children to complete a trip to the restroom, and return to their seats on time for Act II of the show.

#### **UNIVERSITY ISSUES THAT EFFECT SLT- SAFETY**

A frequent complaint about Dixon Hall concerns its dangerous balcony stairs. There is no railing for a person to grip as he/she struggles to find their seats. This has served as a hazard for people without balance or strength, particularly the elderly crowd.

#### **UNIVERSITY ISSUES THAT EFFECT SLT- PARKING**

Parking options near Dixon Hall are scarce. Chances for a patron to find a space in the parking lot adjacent to Dixon thirty minutes or less prior to a show are slim, as the only small parking lot is shared with Tulane Shakespeare Festival, the campus library, and any other events that may be happening at the time of a show. There are no designated parking spots for regular Summer Lyric ticket holders. The parking option for patrons that cannot find spaces in that lot is

to put their cars in a Tulane parking tower six blocks from the theatre. If a patron does not plan for the six-block walk, he or she will be late for the show.

During the years 2011 and 2012, construction has taken place during the summer months near Dixon Hall. In 2011, the construction disturbed the run of SLT shows so much that Charlie Hayes made an arrangement with Loyola Parking and Transit to allow Summer Lyric patrons to park in a Loyola University garage. SLT paid for a shuttle bus to bring patrons to and from their vehicles left in the Loyola tower. This was a temporary solution to their parking problems, but unfortunately since SLT provided that service once patrons now expect it. It was not offered in 2012, after it was offered in 2011. This caused for inconvenience and poor time management on the audience's part, as they thought they'd be able to park in the Loyola tower and catch a shuttle to the theatre.

## **ELDERLY PATRONS**

An observation I made during my time at Tulane SLT was that the majority of its patron base is elderly. As sad as it is to think about, SLT must prepare itself for losing many of its loyal patrons to old age in the upcoming years. No thought has been given to this issue yet (Workman).

## **ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

To cross reference the weaknesses I pointed out, I'll now look at opportunities available for SLT to improve them. Such opportunities include:

- Online ticketing integration
- Proper alphabetization when filing paperwork
- Grant writing
- Audience expansion
  - An effort to appeal to young audience members using social media outlets
  - Offering discounts for Thursday and/or Friday night shows
  - Social event to build patron base
  - Holding an additional matinee performance

## **ONLINE TICKETING**

One way to improve the ticketing process at Tulane SLT is to implement the use of an online ticketing service. Doing so would increase sales and take pressure off of phone orders. Putting an online ticketing system in place at SLT is inevitable. It is my observation from working in the box office that an online ticketing system would increase efficiency and reduce mistakes. Setting up an online ticketing system through any one of the top available services is easy and inexpensive. Summer Lyric is passing up an opportunity to better serve its customers by not signing up with an online ticketing service such as Vendini, Eventbrite, Ticket Bud, ShowTix4U, or Ticket River.

## **ALPHABETIZING WHILE FILING**

There is a simple solution for their inefficient filing system. Rather than put a customer's order form in the folder that is labeled with the first letter of her last name, take a few moments to alphabetize it at the time of filing. This "short cut" of organizing this form only by the first initial of the surname saves about two seconds at the time of filing; however, the result of this action wastes at least 10 minutes when an order form must be located and all paperwork in a file folder has to be sifted through.

## **AUDIENCE EXPANSION - SOCIAL OUTREACH**

It is difficult to reach potential young audience members (teens, 20-somethings, and 30-somethings) without being active in several popular social media outlets. Facebook is free and its advertisement prices are inexpensive.

SLT has an opportunity to gain younger donors and subscribers by hosting an exciting, social fundraising event that people would look forward to attending annually to increase revenue and sustainability. This could help to build a loyal younger following and keep SLT in the minds of potential customers during the off-season.

## **AUDIENCE EXPANSION - DISCOUNTS/PROMOTIONS**

Another frustrating situation that arises in the box office is that no discounted tickets are offered at Tulane Summer Lyric. Patrons often ask if there are less expensive options for senior citizens, students, and artists. The answer is, "I'm sorry but we don't offer any discounts. All orchestra and first balcony tickets are \$37.00 and all second balcony tickets are \$28.00."

Thursday and Friday evening performances are generally not sold out and leave at least 100 empty seats available. There is an opportunity to discount those particular evenings by a



few dollars to increase revenue and leave patrons willing to pay full price for the show times with higher demand (i.e. the Saturday evening show and the Sunday matinee). Promotions can be made available to the community through previously mentioned social media outlets at little or no cost to the organization.

#### **ADDITIONAL MATINEE**

Sunday matinees are the most popular shows each summer. As previously discussed, many of SLT's recurring patrons and donors are elderly and enjoy attending the theatre during the day. To better serve these patrons, SLT may want to take the opportunity to present them with an option of a Saturday matinee. This would alleviate disappointment for customers that want to see SLT productions during the day only to find their preferred seat is unavailable, a standing room only ticket is their only option, or worst of all that the show is completely sold out.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL THREATS**

### **FLOODING & HURRICANES**

Hurricane season begins annually on June 1 and ends in mid-November. There is an abundance of rain during the New Orleans summer months. If a hurricane forms in the Gulf during the run of a Summer Lyric production the money, talent, and effort spent on that show is lost.

Drainage near Dixon Hall is poorly designed and the area cannot withstand much rainfall. This issue is beginning to be resolved by the City of New Orleans, but has caused much grief over the years (Morris-Uptown Messenger). Uptown New Orleans receives so much rain with such poor drainage, cars have been known to flood while parked near Dixon Hall and in other areas of Tulane's campus.

### **ECONOMIC ISSUES**

It is a widely known fact that budgets across America have been reduced since the stock market crashed in 2008. When budgets are evaluated and decreased, the arts are often the first to be eliminated. Fortunately for Summer Lyric it has survived the last four years without facing budget cuts. This good fortune may not always come to SLT.

### **COMPETITION**

The New Orleans theatre community is growing. Over the next few years, Tulane may see itself in competition with the NOLA Fringe Festival and other companies like NOLA Project.

These types of events and festivals appeal to the younger crowd and make smart use of social media outlets better than Summer Lyric.

## Chapter 7- Best Practices

According to Tess Collins, author of How Theatre Managers Manage, there are generally 3 types of managers within a theatre office. These three include: Head Usher/Usher Manager, Head of Expenses, and General Manager. Tulane SLT does not necessarily follow Collins' outline, but effectively covers the positions mentioned above in its own fashion.

The Head Usher at Tulane SLT is a volunteer, Sharon Smehterman. She comes to the theatre two hours prior to each performance and gives a quick training session to the other volunteer ushers. She tells them how to tear the tickets, fold program inserts, distribute programs, and show patrons to their assigned seats. Sharon makes sure to have enough volunteer buttons for her ushers to wear and flashlights on hand for her team to use once the performance begins.

In addition to being prepared for every show, Sharon is available to handle squabbles among patrons and volunteers as they happen. Patrons run into problems such as not coming to the correct performance, having to finish refreshments before entering the theatre, sitting in the wrong seat, arguing with other patrons, arguing with staff members or ushers, worrying about letting the usher take their walker to the hallway, etc. Sharon is available to put out any fires that start before the show begins. Once the performance starts, she goes into the lobby to address the challenges of late arrivers.

Rather than two separate people serving as "Head of Expenses" and "General Manager," Charlie Hayes (Operations Manager) and Michael Batt (Production Manager) split responsibilities for tasks related to these two positions. Charlie handles financial reports and

general management duties for the front of the house including box office, photography orders, advertising, marketing, press, publicity, website, auditions, house management, catering, patron parties, steering committee issues, payroll, front of house volunteers, actors, budgets, and more. Michael Batt handles financial reports for costume and scene shop management. He oversees back stage duties including set design, set budgets, technician labor, student workers, back stage volunteers, safety requirements, and more. B. Michael Howard (Artistic Director & General Manager) oversees all operations and has the final say in making decisions (see Appendix B).

Tess Collins also states that the best customer service lie is, “I’m sorry, it will never happen again.” This was a phrase used frequently at SLT. Patrons generally get upset when one of the following events occurs:

- Their seat locations aren’t where they thought they’d be
- A staff member or volunteer is perceived as rude
- Another customer irritated them
- The sound volume is too loud
- The play isn’t what they expected
- They come on the wrong performance day
- They cannot see the stage the way they’d like to
- There aren’t enough bathrooms
- They want a refund for their experience

While interning in the box office at SLT, I believe I witnessed each of these situations at least one time each. Many of these issues stemmed from poor communication on Summer Lyric's behalf. A common way we would deal with the complaints was by saying, "I'm so sorry, it won't happen again."

Customers expect a lot in exchange for their ticket purchase. In 1971, Broadway ticket prices were \$3.00 on average. In 2003, the average price for a Broadway theatre ticket was \$90.00. Price increased by 3000 percent in the time span of 32 years (Collins). While Tulane Theatre is not Broadway, prices are different now than they were 40 years ago. While Summer Lyric records cannot be located to prove the rate of tickets in 1968, I was able to find a man, Doug Park, who has been involved with SLT since 1986. He remembers that tickets were priced at \$19.00 each during that year of operation. There is no indication current prices will ever be lowered.

An increased ticket price results in higher patron expectation. Today's theatre attendee wants more than a show. Collins states that consumers expect their evenings at the theatre to begin as soon as they leave their houses. They expect to be able to park at the theatre without hassle. They expect there to be no line when they try to go to the restroom. They expect the luxury of enjoying refreshments, mingling with friends, being ushered to their seats, and most importantly being treated with dignity and respect while enjoying their expensive event. When the theatre fails to meet any of these expectations, patrons often become rude, irate, out of line, and/or demanding. If the staff of any theatre wants to succeed, they must be ready to meet patron expectations by providing an above average performance, to have tickets in order,

and to make sure patrons may see, hear, and enjoy the performance free of disturbance from their assigned seats. Theatre staff should try to anticipate any mishaps and have a system in place to preempt them. Dissatisfaction can often result in patrons yelling, threatening staff, or disturbing others around them. This is not an ideal situation, and should be avoided and well planned for by the staff of any theatre.

## Chapter 8- Similar Organization

Shenandoah Summer Music Theatre at Shenandoah University is similar to Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre in many ways. Each program is part of a university, and operates in a theatre on a university campus. These theatre programs allow opportunities for students to participate in performances with professionals. Shenandoah's ticket prices are not exactly the same as SLT, but they are similar. Summer Lyric Theatre has been around longer than Shenandoah, but Shenandoah Summer Music Theatre is nonetheless a successful, thriving company that just completed its 29<sup>th</sup> season. According to its website, SSMT is well established in its community and the surrounding areas, attracting audiences from as far as 150 miles away.

In 1983, Harold Herman decided to establish a professional summer theatre within Shenandoah University. He wanted to give his community, Winchester/Frederick County, an opportunity to view Broadway musicals with affordable ticket prices. Shenandoah Summer Music Theatre (SSMT) produces four musicals each summer. The Ohrstrom-Bryant Theatre, where its productions are staged, has 630 seats. SSMT offers thirteen performances of each show which run for two weeks at a time. Group tickets are known to be purchased from as far away as Ohio and North Carolina ([shenandoahsummermusictheatre.com](http://shenandoahsummermusictheatre.com)).

Taking the information discussed above, my observation is that SSMT advertises to a wider range of possible patrons than SLT. I say this because it is clearly stated on its website that groups from Ohio and North Carolina purchase tickets. I know from working in the box office that most of SLT's group ticket sales are purchased by local patrons.



SSMT offers more performances of each production than SLT. It also provides videos of its productions on its website. A person wanting to know what they're paying for may watch a clip of a past show at SSMT. This is a unique and helpful sales tool, assuming the video a potential patron clicks is of quality. Its website gives off a fun vibe with its vibrant colors of gold and burgundy. Tulane's site is mostly gray and has many serious photographs on it. SSMT's site has upbeat photographs of people dancing and smiling. This gives off the impression that a person will experience an enjoyable time when attending a production there. Both websites could use some updates. They are not as user friendly as other websites that offer similar experiences.

I find this next practice to be most beneficial to SSMT: it offer an online ticketing option for its patrons to purchase tickets without calling, leaving messages, waiting to be called back, and hoping their tickets are waiting for them at Will Call. I am a firm believer in making a product as accessible as possible for purchase. From working in the box office, I know that patrons of Summer Lyric Theatre often must jump through hoops just to buy a ticket. This is not fair or efficient.

## Chapter 9- Recommendations for Improvement

### PROGRAMMING

It is my recommendation that Tulane SLT put more emphasis on appealing to younger audience members. It does what it did 44 years ago well. It has mastered professional summer musical theatre of past generations. It provides high quality, very enjoyable entertainment. It is my fear that time will pass by and SLT will find itself forgotten. A large majority of its patrons are elderly. For the most part, SLT produces traditional musical theatre. It is not the kind of establishment to produce shows that appeal to young audiences (e.g. *Seussical*, *Urinetown*, *The Little Mermaid*). SLT has been known to produce shows such as *Carousel*, *My Fair Lady*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *South Pacific*, and *The Music Man* on more than one occasion. I, as an actor, patron, volunteer, and intern of Tulane SLT would like to see more of the fun, hip, new variety of shows in the future.

### MARKETING

In this area Summer Lyric currently sends out emails announcing its season. It also sends mailers to previous season subscribers letting them know it is time to renew. In addition to these types of inside marketing I recommend SLT market its season by asking multiple local magazines such as *St. Charles Avenue*, *New Orleans Magazine*, and *Lagniappe* to cover their season in a special interest column in print and/or on their websites. Editors may choose to perform this task as a favor in exchange for a couple of performance tickets. It would spread the word for SLT free of charge if they were able to arrange deals like this.

Summer Lyric does not currently maintain social media very well. It does not have a Twitter account, and Facebook use is minimal. My second marketing suggestion is for SLT to invest in a Facebook advertisement while updating its page at least twice per week with exciting information about the upcoming season. In addition to Facebook, a constantly updated Twitter account would benefit SLT, especially if it offered temporary discounted tickets for its followers. This would help it to reach out to the younger generation of the New Orleans' theatre audience.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

I believe that Summer Lyric will last for many more years to come. Its chances of doing so would improve if it involved the community a bit more by hosting an annual event and improving patron parties. People need more than a complimentary glass of wine and a few pieces of candy to desire donating over \$250+ per year to SLT. My suggestion is for Summer Lyric to host fundraising events that will impress potential patrons and influence them proud to invest in SLT's growth.

My main recommendation is for Summer Lyric to plan a yearly cocktail season announcement party with a silent auction. The party could be open to the public with ticket prices including the first two bar drinks. Knowing New Orleanians, they'd spend lots of money at the bar after finishing their first two drinks. The alcohol would need to be donated, along with the food, auction prizes, etc. The money could be put into the website, a faster ticketing system, paid ushers, a shuttle for far away parking spaces, safer staircases, extra restrooms, and

anything else that would make attending Summer Lyric performances easier more enjoyable than they presently are.

Summer Lyric Theatre takes no part in seeking funds from grants. Applying for grants is an excellent opportunity for SLT to fix its bathroom situation by adding signage or renting portable restrooms. Grant funds could also assist in adding railings in the balcony to counter the safety issue and to also rent a shuttle to transport people parking a far distance away.

### **IMPROVING TICKET ACCESS**

I believe it is in the best interest of Summer Lyric Theatre to upgrade box office technology as soon as possible. There are many inexpensive online ticketing programs available on the internet, many of which may be integrated with current databases and software programs.

### **VENUE RELATED ISSUES**

I would like to see Dixon Hall improved in three ways. Safety in the balcony is my number one concern. Installation of a rail cannot be avoided any longer. Postponement of railing implementation opens invitations for law suits. Secondly, a shuttle service to transport audience members from the parking garage to the theatre should be consistently offered in the future. Parking is scarce, and walking from the tower to the theatre poses issues of poor time management, discomfort, and frustration for theatre goers. Finally, I recommend that the staff of SLT puts bathroom signage up in the lobby (even if it is temporary) for each show.

## **LEGAL APPLICATIONS**

From what I have gathered from Charlie F. Hayes, SLT covers its legal bases. It is extremely conscious of rules, regulations, and compliance. When it uses an Equity actor in a performance, it provides everything required for that actor. It does not sell DVDs because it is not in compliance with the production rights. SLT does not sell merchandise because it doesn't want to fuss with the Unrelated Business Income Tax. I have no legal application suggestions for this organization.

## **COMMENTS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF SUMMER LYRIC THEATRE**

I think SLT must begin work on a plan now for its future audiences and leadership. In this process, it needs to address how to expand its audience among New Orleans' youth. People aren't entertained solely by the traditional musical anymore. Many new-age shows require spectacle. Spectacle is expensive therefore SLT cannot so heavily rely on ticket sales to produce higher caliber shows in the future.

It is inevitable that B. Michael Howard cannot remain the head of SLT forever. There is not yet a successor in place for his retirement. It is important for SLT to take this matter into consideration.

My suggestion is for the SLT board to appoint a small, discreet committee to consider these long range issues for SLT. When the time comes for Howard to retire, Summer Lyric can keep operations running smoothly with a plan in place.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

I would like to see Tulane SLT flourish, grow, and sustain for many years to come. This widely adored organization has impacted the lives of musical theater lovers, socialites, actors, musicians, directors, and choreographers for 44 years. It has maintained its mission beautifully. Those who've experienced its productions in any way are fortunate enough to say they've seen quality musical theatre produced in New Orleans, LA. To sustain itself, Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre must look toward the future with open eyes and an open mind. Change is inevitable and cannot be avoided. SLT means so much to so many people so it must establish its plan for the future today.

It was my privilege to serve as an intern for this historical organization during the 2012 season. I learned a lot about front-of-house operations and for that I am grateful. I will carry my new-found knowledge with me in my own future and allow it to help me grow. I am eager to apply what I learned to my work in the New Orleans performing arts community.

## **Appendix A**

### **Season History**

2012- Sunset Boulevard, Anything Goes, Fiddler on the Roof

2011 - Man of La Mancha, Into the Woods, The Drowsy Chaperone

2010 - Mame, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, The Music Man

2009 - Oliver, Company, South Pacific

2008 - Pal Joey, Li'l Abner, Oklahoma!

2007 - Little Me, Chicago, High Society

2006 - Show Boat, Bye Bye Birdie, Pippin

2005 - Candide, West Side Story, Wonderful Town

2004 - The Mikado, Camelot, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat

2003 - Pirates of Penzance, Guys and Dolls, Gypsy

2002 - Annie Get your Gun, Phantom, Victor/Victoria

2001 - My Fair Lady, Will Rogers Follies, Annie

2000 - Carousel, How Succeed in Business without Really Trying, Fiddler on the Roof

1999 - La Cage aux Folles, Sound of Music, Damn Yankees

1998 - Funny Girl, Meet Me St. Louis, South Pacific

1997 - Peter Pan, Brigadoon, The Music Man

1996 - Kiss Me Kate, Kismet, Crazy for You

1995 - Man of La Mancha, A Little Night Music, Oliver

1994 - Sweeny Todd, On the Town, The King and I

1993 - Cabaret, A Chorus Line, Camelot

1992 - Most Happy Fella, Big River, Company, Best Little Whorehouse in Texas

1991 - La Cage aux Folles, Pajama Game, Me and My Girl

1990 - Carousel, Follies, Gypsy

1989 - Evita, Gigi, 42nd Street

1988 - Oklahoma, Chicago, A Funny Thing Happened on the way to the Forum

1987 - My Fair Lady, Little Mary Sunshine, Anything Goes

1986 - Hello Dolly, Jesus Christ Superstar, South Pacific

1985 - West Side Story, Shenandoah, Annie

1984 - Brigadoon, 1776, No No Nannette

1983 - The Music Man, The Merry Widow, Unsinkable Molly Brown

1982 - Mame, El Capitan, Cabaret

1981 - Sound of Music, Kiss Me Kate, Kismet

1980 - Damn Yankees, A Little Night Music, Annie Get Your Gun

1979 - Fiddler on the Roof, The King and I, Man of La Mancha

1978 - Girl Crazy, Die Fledermaus, Camelot

1977 - Gigi, The Student Prince, Oliver

1976 - My Fair Lady, Naughty Marietta, Oklahoma

1975 - Finian's Rainbow, Carousel, West Side Story

1974 - Guys and Dolls, Kiss me Kate, Gypsy Baron

1973 - Brigadoon, HMS Pinafore, Trial by Jury, New Moon

1972 - The Music Man, Gypsy, Kismet

1971 - South Pacific, Vagabond King, Die Fledermaus

1970 - The Sound of Music, Pirates of Penzance, The Merry Widow

1969 - Showboat, The King and I, The Mikado

1968 - Annie Get Your Gun, The Student Prince, Carousel



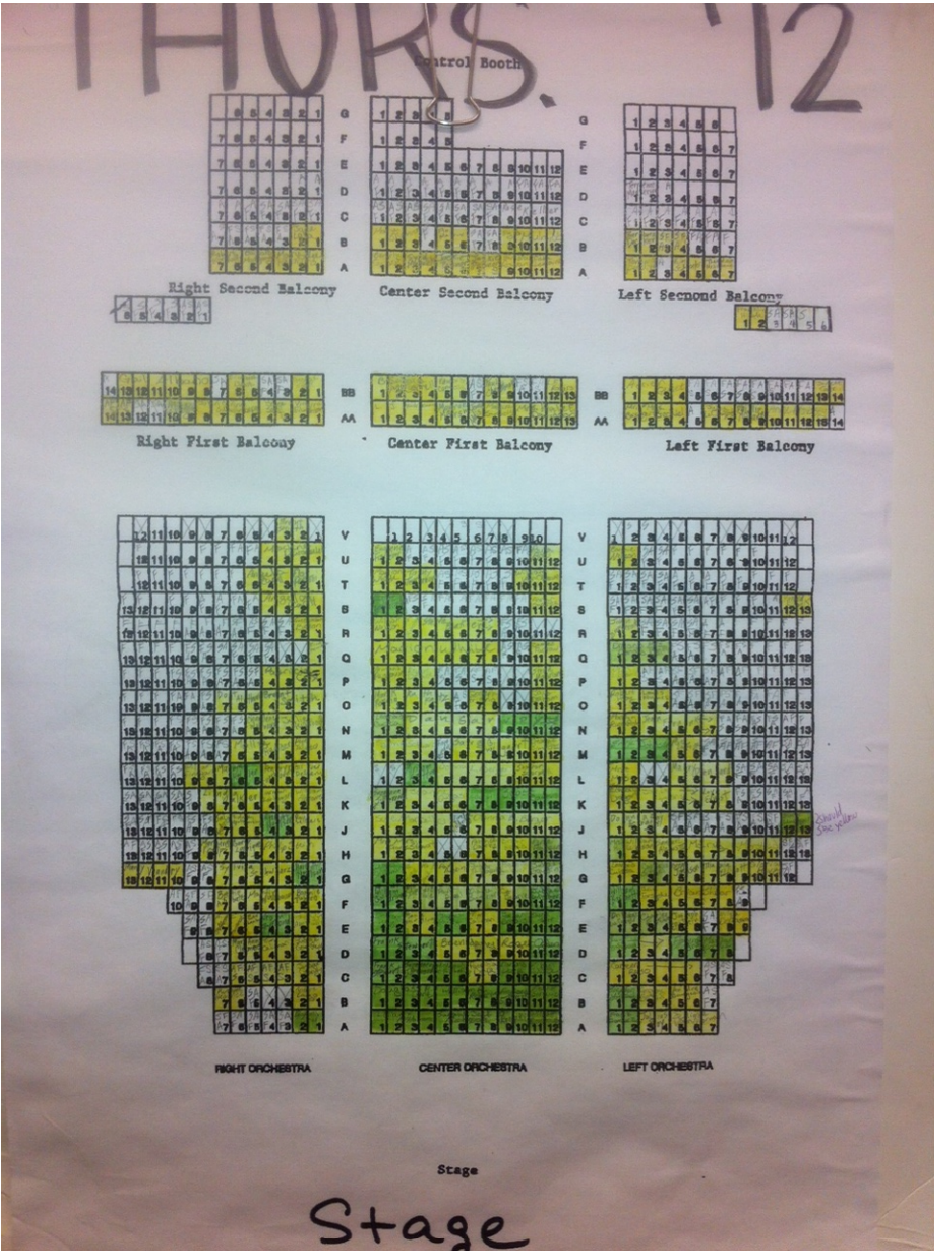
## **Appendix B**

### **Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre**

#### **Department Outline of Hierarchy**

- I. Artistic Director- B. Michael Howard
  - a. Organizational Manager- Charlie Farve Hayes
    - i. Musicians
    - ii. Actors
    - iii. Ushers
    - iv. Box Office
  - b. Production Manager- Michael Batt
    - i. Technical Crew
    - ii. Costumers

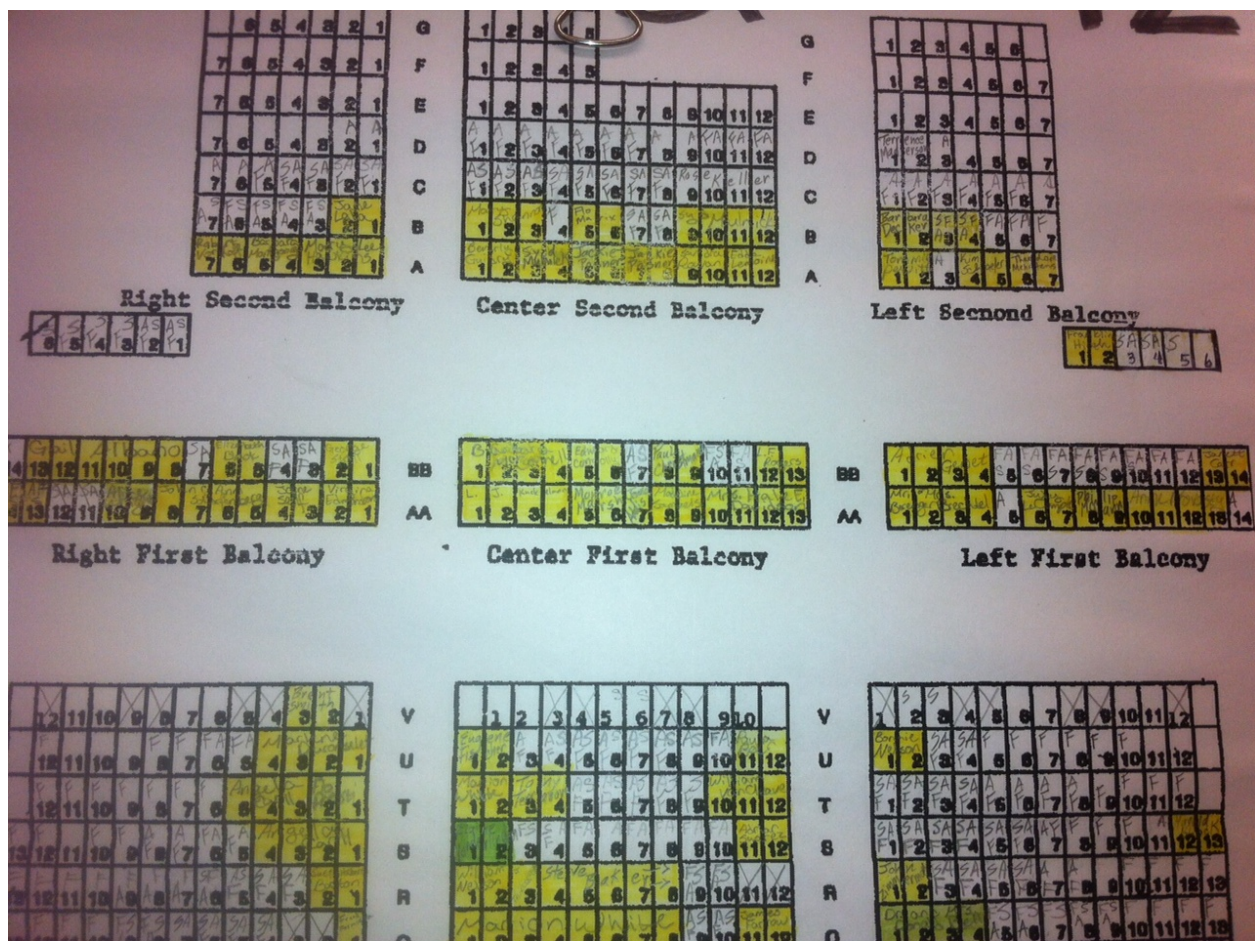
Appendix C



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13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	J	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	K	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	H	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	J	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
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13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	A	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	B	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1			A	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

RIGHT ORCHESTRA                      CENTER ORCHESTRA                      LEFT ORCHESTRA





## Appendix D

### Examples of Volunteer Coordination Cross Reference Spreadsheets:

a) Show assignments alphabetically organized by person:

Last	First	ANYTHING GOES - Preview; Weds. July 11, 8pm	ANYTHING GOES - Opening; Thurs. July 12, 8pm	ANYTHING GOES - Performance; Fri. July 13, 8pm	ANYTHING GOES - Performance; Sat. July 14, 8pm
Abbott	Gerri	X			
Adams	Bunny				X
Allegra	A.J.		X		X
Alleman	Elaine	X			X
Allen	Dee				
Altier	Bri				
Andrews	Chris				
Anhill	Dennis			X	
Arguello	Alan			X	

b) Show assignments cross referenced by performance each person is assigned:

<b>FIDDLER - Preview; Weds. Aug. 1, 8pm</b>	<b>FIDDLER - Opening; Thurs. Aug. 2, 8pm</b>	<b>FIDDLER - Performance; Fri. Aug. 3, 8pm</b>	<b>FIDDLER - Performance; Sat. Aug. 4, 8pm</b>	<b>FIDDLER - Matinee; Sun. Aug. 5, 8pm</b>	
Linda Wegmann	Alexis Lapre	Wilma Reed	Pepper Curuso	Joyce Ortego	
Phyllis Pittman	Carlos Gonzalez	Evelyn Comeaux	Dominic Lloyd	Faye Didier	
Laurie Goodell	Krystyna	Janice Musso	Savannah Lloyd	Claire Toups	
Lois Winchester	Patrick	Astra Thibodeaux	Cristina Roe-Guerra	Evelyn Leonard	

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## Vita

Allison Kate Barron Brandon was born in Lafayette, LA. She grew up there, attending Comeaux High School and University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She earned her BFA in Performing Arts, Theatre in May of 2008. She moved to New Orleans in September, 2008, and began her professional musical theatre career. She's performed in numerous productions including *Oliver!* (Ensemble) and *The Drowsy Chaperone* (Janet Van De Graaff) at Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre, *Let Freedom Swing* (Lorna Baker) at the National WWII Museum, and *The Wedding Singer* (Holly) at Le Petit Theatre. She began her studies in the Arts Administration Graduate Program at the University of New Orleans in 2010. She hopes to use her education to help the theatre community of New Orleans grow and flourish.



UNIVERSITY of  
NEW ORLEANS

## MASTER'S EXAMINATION REPORT Non-Thesis

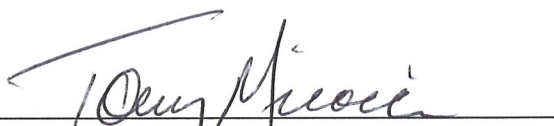
CANDIDATE: Allison Barron

MAJOR PROGRAM: Arts Administration

APPROVED

Tony Micocci

Major Professor (typed)

  
Signature

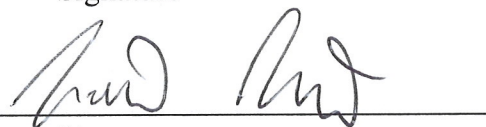
Harmon Greenblatt

Committee Member (typed)

  
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Richard Read

Committee Member (typed)

  
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Committee Member (typed)

Signature

Dean of the Graduate School

Signature

DATE OF EXAMINATION:

November 13, 2012